

# JEEVADHARA

*A JOURNAL OF CHRISTIAN INTERPRETATION*

## BORN OF A WOMAN

### A. WOMEN'S MOVEMENTS

*Judith Siqueira*  
*Aruna Gnanadason*  
*Nandita Haksar*  
*Pamela Philipose*  
*Padmasani J. Gallup*

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### B. WOMEN'S SONGS

*Gabriele Dietrich*  
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*Vibhuti Patel*  
*Stella Balthazar*

# **JEEVADHARA**

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**JEEVADHARA**

# **The Living Christ**

**BORN OF A WOMAN**

Editor:

**SAMUEL RAYAN**

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## Editorial

This is the second number that *Jeevadhara* devotes this year to the cause of women. No apology is deemed necessary for doing so. The style is different, the cause is worthy, and it calls for multiple reflection, listening sharing and urgent action.

All of us, women and men, originate from women and men, from our mothers and fathers. Nevertheless the birth and growth processes of every one of us are bound up more closely, deeply, emotionally, spiritually, physically, psychologically and socially with our mothers than with our fathers, with women than with men, in our most impressionable and formative early years in particular. It can be humanising and liberating to consider carefully the contribution our mothers and other women in the home and its neighbourhood have made to the creation of our concrete self, our physique, our character, our talents and tastes, our total personality. How come, then, that all over the world, through a great part of history, in most cultures, women — our sisters and mothers and guides and educators — have been despised as impure, inferior, irrational, unintelligent and fickle, and have accordingly been slighted, laughed at, ignored, ill-treated, secluded, violated and abused? And down the centuries neither they nor their sons have risen up in effective indignation and revolt against a macho-culture that pours insult on everyone *born of woman*! Few sons and brothers have, to our endless shame, stood up to denounce this macho-patriarchal insanity, and to defend the honour, the dignity, the greatness, the mystery and the rights of our mothers and sisters. In very recent years,



however, women have themselves woken up and spoken out and challenged patriarchy in all its forms, all its ramifications, at all levels of life. The many protective shells of patriarchy are being exploded one after another. Women are giving us the opportunity and the privilege of listening, reflecting, and acting with them to end this shame of all times.

True, poets and lovers have sung the praises of women. They have done so mostly from within the patriarchal culture which they rarely, if ever, called in question or sought to subvert. So many of them have treated women as pretty dolls, or beautiful souls, or sex objects, or foil to macho ambition and bravado. True admiration and respect for women often remained private, or, when social, they were bestowed on the "ladies", exceptional feminine specimen of top social classes. Patriarchy has become a profound disease infecting thought and feelings, society and relationships.

Religions have not always shown themselves clear or consistent in their attitude to and treatment of women. They have had their goddesses. Most of the goddesses have been objects of the same cynicism and contempt as attached to the rank and file of women on this earth. Where a goddess was treated differently, her exaltation and worship became compensation and substitution for the shabby subhuman lot meted out to women in day to day life. Few or no religions have been faithful to the truth of their deepest original insights in their attitude to and dealings with women. They have tended readily to succumb to the mores and manners of prevailing male-centred cultures. Why, else, did Buddhist legends have to make Gautama come to birth not in the normal way but through his mother's side?

Christians confess Jesus to be divine. With equal clarity and conviction they confess that he was born of a

woman; he shaped up and developed in a woman's womb from where he emerged in the way all babies do. He grew up sucking this woman's breasts and receiving nourishment from her for his whole bodily spiritual human personal development. As a religious teacher and a committed witness to God's Rule over the earth Jesus was always positive towards women, and respectful. He admitted them among his disciples and followers, depended on their services, and let them express their love and devotion as they chose to express them, prescribing nothing except the hearing and the heeding of God's word, and defending them time and again against male criticism. To them he made original revelation of the fundamental truths of his message and movement: his suffering Messiahship (Mk 14:3-9; Mt 26: 6-13; Jn 12:1-8) and his Resurrection (Mk 16:1-8; Mt 28: 1-10; Lk 24:1-12; Jn 20:1-18). In spite of all this, christian churches have succumbed to subchristian cultural traditions in a series of practices, theories and laws which subtly and not so subtly teach contempt for women and inculcate the macho mood and patriarchy. An exaggerated veneration of the Virgin Mary has often acted as an opium and a cover for real oppression of real women. Today, however, several churches have begun to make amends for past sins and crimes committed against women and against the Creator and Redeemer and Friend of women. But the older and greater churches still continue to nurse their myopic vision and spiritual insensitivity.

But the cause of women is advancing and becoming a sign of the times and a place of theology. It is moving along a veritable way of the cross, moving up Calvaries, passing through deaths, and steadily making for the Resurrection. The women's movement is Christological: it is a story of the coming and manifestation of God's Kingdom/Queendom from the hidden obscurity and lowliness of Bethlehem and Nazareth, from the hostility of Herods and empires which seek to kill it in its infancy, from the necessity to flee before violence and be a refugee, from the cynicism and opposition of legal religionists and



patriarchal priests, through sufferings imposed by priestly and princely powers, on to the affirmation of life as being above all sabbaths and sacred taboos, to the affirmation of caring for the broken as being above temples and sacrifices, to solidarity with the poor and the wretched of the earth even in defiance of the claims of prince and priest, to option for equality and love as being subversive of patriarchies, hierarchies, generals and their pyramids of human sacrifice. The Christological story of women is the story of the grain of wheat cast into the fold of the earth: it dies only to rise in newness of life and beauty and fruitfulness. The story of women is the story of the stone rejected by the builders becoming the corner stone. It is a scandal to patriarchal eyes and machominds, but to the simple and the unlearned it is the work of God, Mary's God whose project it is to remove enthroned might and lift up the lowly.

Not all women have woken up to the greatness of their womanhood, nor to the reality of the (social, religious, economic and cultural) chains and prisons that hold them captive. Many Asian women see themselves as "supportive roles" for male endeavours, and are strangely willing to bear the burden. Some regret child-beating and wife-battering, but accept patriarchy and the absolute dominion of the male over his family as natural and unquestionable. Not all see the "profound relationship between the fact that women and children are attacked, beaten and raped, and the fact that nuclear war and ecological catastrophe threaten our planet"; and between these facts and the organization of greed and competitive profit collection into a veritable system called capitalism. There are many who have not yet realized that "resistance to war, nuclear weapons and nuclear energy is impossible without resistance to sexism, racism, imperialism, and violence as an everyday reality". (cf. Petra Kelly, "New Forms of Power: The Green Feminist View," in *Breakthrough* 7/4, Summer 1986, p. 36). That is why the United States of America have thrown up a Coalition named Women for a Secure Future



made up of six conservative organizations, working in 20 States to build political pressure and support in favour of Reagan Administration's war stance, military build-up and Star Wars in particular; it is headquartered in Washington, and is headed by a man, a male, as director.

But the many women who have not thus interiorised patriarchal oppression and have not become engulfed and alienated, are aware of the many structures of domination: 'nation over nation, economic class over economic class, race over race. But the domination of women by men remains a constant feature within every other aspect of oppression ... across the cultural divide, sexism is the only thing all countries have in common ... it is the one thing a black man and a white man can shake hands on, if on nothing else' (Petra Kelly, *ibid.*). This situation, therefore, and the struggles of women for "half the earth and half the sky", for the restoration of a balance and for "a harmony between the feminine and the masculine" cannot but be a major concern of Christology today.

This issue of *Jeevadhara* carries a number of women's stories, all told by women — Hindu, Christian, lay, religious women. They are, most of them, short stories. They are personal stories. Each of them has a face and voice of its own, even when there is an appearance of repetition. The repetition is proof of the existence of a common, widely shared experience of oppression and of the new awakening. The personality of each story is proof of the sharpness and depth of each one's experience. They are ordinary stories, part of an extraordinary movement — that of women for their own liberation which includes the liberation of men from male chauvinism, and promises the unblocking of many a spring of life. The stories are echoes of women's sufferings, struggles, groans, cries, hopes, tears, songs, insights, laughter, tenacity and anger, and their invincible affirmation of life. It is an obligation and a privilege for all of us to hear them and to heed.

Like the Bible, these are stories and voices of the oppressed. Like the Bible stories, these too are the people's theology. Asian theology, like the Bible, is narrative theology. It is symbolic, poetic and suggestive. Theology is latent in the story. The story is pregnant with the perspective of the oppressed on life, human beings, God, sexuality, grace, the earth and human wholeness. It is up to the reader to exercise a theological midwifery and assist these perspectives to come to birth in some form of art.

Vidya Jyoti  
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Samuel Rayan



# **Thy Kingdom Come, Thy Will Be Done on Planet Earth, Your Home and Mine**

In May '86, I spent two days at Greenham Common, in Newbury, about fifty miles from London. Greenham Common was Common land. The British Government entered into a treaty with the American government and set up a military base there under NATO and without the consent of the local people. The base is about nine miles in area, and there are six entrances to it. Women camp at each of these gates in a nonviolent protest against nuclear war. They have camped there through five winters living in a state of protest and confrontation with their own government and the American military personnel on the base.

Before leaving for London, I had heard of the Greenham Common peace campers and one purpose of my trip was to visit the camp. In London, I was directed to Newbury and then had to find my way to Greenham Common. I was warned that the local people are quite hostile towards the peace campers and so I'd have difficulty in finding my way to the camps.

With some difficulty, I did get to one of the gates. Each gate is called after a colour — green gate, yellow gate etc. I think this was the green gate. Nobody there looked at me, welcomed me, asked me to sit down, I tried talking, but nobody seemed willing to talk. There was an eerie coldness there. It had rained, and there was a cutting wind that matched the coldness of the peace campers. I was so disappointed that I thought I'd try my luck at the next gate. The peace campers told me to walk through the woods until I came to the next gate, which I did not feel was safe enough to do, and so it meant a trip back

to town and finding my way from town by road to the next gate.

Discussing this experience with some women in the peace movement later on, I was told that the peace campers are often too tired and drained to welcome people or even to communicate with them. They also want space to be themselves and believe that those interested in the Greenham peace movement may come and stay and see.

The atmosphere at the next gate was very different. The women were friendly and welcoming and very communicative. I was happy to spend the rest of the day and the following day with them. Today reading these lines, I can assert "Greenham is haunting. It gets into your head and it won't be shaken out. Each woman's experience varies from every other woman's experience because the cast of characters changes daily and sometimes even many times in a day. Given the physical limitations of the place it is people who are all that matter... I realised that Greenham had burrowed into my consciousness and was gnawing away a lot of old ideas. After you have been there you start to reassess almost everything in life."<sup>1</sup> I realise how true this has been of my own experience.

The present peace movement at Greenham Common was not planned. In Sept. '81 'Women For Life On Earth' sponsored a march from Cardiff Wales to the United States Air Force base at Greenham Common. The purpose of the march was to focus attention on the horrors of the American Cruise missiles in Britain in accordance with a NATO decision of Dec. 12, '79. The media was disinterested and the commandant of the base even suggested that the marchers would have to stay a long time before they would receive any publicity. 'Women For Life On Earth' decided to stay on and so there has been a continuous stream of women around the base.

Here are women protesting against nuclear war, and the use of British soil for nuclear war. As one peace

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1. "Those Amazing Women" Virginia Baron, *Fellowship* Oct.- Nov '84, p. 4



camper put it to me, "Britain is a democracy, but my view was not asked for in the stationing of Cruise missiles in Britain". Another said, "The money saved through unilateral disarmament, could be given to Lafrasia."<sup>2</sup> In case of war all schools, hospitals, etc. in the locality may be requisitioned by the Americans, thus compromising British sovereignty.

As I was told all this, I could not help thinking of the experience I had, arriving in London at Heathrow. I was travelling alone, for the first time leaving India. I had dreaded the cold of England — the cold climate and the cold reserve of the people — and of having to go through customs and immigration clearance. I was also exhausted and anxious about finding my way to the house of people I was to stay with and did not know. At customs and immigration the officials were coldly polite, so cold as almost to be rude I saw no sign directing one to a taxi stand, but only to a car park. To avoid the confusion of getting lost with luggage. I asked an official how to get to the taxi stand. He coldly answered, "Follow the signs". It is when one arrives alone and tired and for the first time that one looks for friendliness and kindness. Perhaps British officials do not want people to go to their country, especially those from Lafrasia. I could not help seeing in contrast the attitude and values of the women at Greenham Common and the officials at Heathrow.

British sovereign power at Heathrow was arrogantly expressed. The official at Heathrow could not say, "My country is the world. All human beings are my sisters and brothers." They personally and officially distance themselves from people. The women at Greenham Common say, "Planet earth is your home and mine. Let us protect it and give the money saved to our sisters and brothers in Lafrasia. Making this decision, working and fighting to realise it is my democratic right to participate in the affairs of my country". What a difference in attitude and value. At Heathrow one sees the cold nationalism of a

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2. Latin America, Africa, Asia

patriarchal society, at Greenham Common is feminine concern for humanity in a universal service.

It is ironical that the military base is situated in a wooded area, beautiful and peaceful. The contrast between barbed wires and cold cement buildings housing a war machine on the one hand and quiet woods with only the birds chirping on the other is very striking.

Greenham Common women are those who have given up careers and families and the comforts of life, who are now out of pocket, living according to their convictions at great personal cost. Down the centuries men have left jobs and families to fight wars. Today women are doing this for peace. One woman said, "I never disapproved; I thought the way a lot of women with children think: that I'd a greater responsibility to them than what I felt was good for me. The thought that these missiles could kill all the people I cared about drastically changed all that. The only logical thing to do was to make a committed stand. I felt I had the right to make that decision on my own without consulting my husband and children. Obviously they were very upset. The youngest is only four and my husband has had to give up his job and go on social security, which he hates, though he understands what I am doing and he supports the peace movement. I just had to decide whether I was going to actively involve myself in this protest or put it aside for someone else to do because of the children. It is one of those decisions which affects the rest of your life — I chose to become involved."<sup>3</sup>

Decisions at the camp at Greenham Common are collectively arrived at. One of the issues being debated, while I was there, was their participation in the peace efforts of various groups in the International Year of Peace. Women at the camp realise that they need money, firewood, goodwill and support from people. Many peace groups and individuals will give this without taking a radical stand for peace and thereby tacitly support an unjust status quo. The peace campers felt that in accepting such support they

3. "Women's Peace Camp Greenham Common" *ISIS Women's Bulletin* No. 26, p. 22



were encouraging a token stand for peace and that this was really destructive of their goals.

The peace campers were also in the process of evaluating the impact they were having on the military personnel and the local people. On the base is a school for the Americans with a super market, in which local people work and which they also patronise. They also work in the houses of the American military personnel. The peace campers felt that if these people refused to work there, the base would not be able to function. However people often think first of economic security and comforts, which have priority over issues of justice and peace, and even the very survival of this planet. The peace campers try talking to various people — the police, the military personnel, the local people to raise their level of awareness of the issues involved.

At Greenham Common one of the women playfully plucked a daffodil and put it into the fence around the base. She was hauled before the court and had to pay a fine of £ 70. It was decided that the peace campers would contribute to this fine as she was like the rest of them out of pocket, and in solidarity with her.

While at Greenham Common I walked around the base with some of the campers who explained to me what was happening on the base. They are aware of the hierarchical set up on the base; the British soldier is at the bottom of the ladder, subordinate to the Americans and dissatisfied. Often the convoy leaves the base on the pretext of going on an exercise. This exercise is really a state of being prepared for war, and calling it an exercise is a beautiful euphemism. Each time the convoy leaves and enters the base women lie on the road forming a human barricade. They have learnt to be alert to its timings, as its timings are often changed, and also its points of entry and departure to avoid the embarrassment of cutting across this human barricade. The police are very violent as they deal with the women using their bodies to barricade the silos.

While we walked around the base a British soldier

also walked around, though on the inside of the fence. He continuously received instructions on his walky talky from the Control Tower, to keep an eye on the women walking around the base. The peace campers told this soldier that he was contributing to war. He said that he would rather be where he was and employed, than outside the base and unemployed. Personal comforts are more important than social survival and must be obtained even at the cost of the survival of our planet. So insecure are we as persons, and this in an affluent and welfare state like England.

Peace campers sometimes leave the camp to return home to rest and to recoup from the physical and emotional strain of living in a state of confrontation with the authorities. They are unable to enter restaurants as they are considered dirty living in makeshift conditions and spending all their resources living for a cause, they are unable to be "respectably" dressed according to the dictates of "society". Besides when one challenges the authorities one is not liked by the "people".

When the peace campers first set up their camp they had all the necessities — caravans, portable toilets, hygienic conditions. These were taken away in an effort to get rid of the campers. Now the women dig their own pits. Because of the cold and rain the land was soggy in May. They had spread a plastic sheet on which were their few belongings — plates, mugs, etc. They slept in benders i.e., saplings bent and covered with plastic sheets secured with heavy stones, and plastic spread on the ground, to make a nest. Often the bailiff would destroy the bender and they would have to make it all over again. Sometimes dead rats have been thrown into their benders.

The peace campers have also to cope with regular daily visits from the bailiff, sometimes twice and thrice a day, sometimes in the middle of the night. The land belonging to the base has been legally extended in an effort to get rid of the campers. They have constantly to be on the look out for the bailiff. Rows of fencing have also been put around the base, as peace campers break



through the fence in the nights, and write peace slogans on the walls of the buildings on the base. Many songs have come out from the experience of the peace campers. One of the songs sung as they engaged in eye to eye contact with the police during a confrontation was the following, giving rise to much mirth and humour:

Ten blue bobbies standing on the brink,  
And if one blue bobby should accidentally think,  
There'll be nine blue bobbies standing on the brink,  
Nine blue bobbies standing on the brink  
And if one blue bobby should accidentally think  
There'll be eight blue bobbies standing on the brink,  
etc. etc.

One sees that there are no rules at Greenham Common. It is everyone's home. Tradition has it that once a woman spends a half hour there she is a Greenham Common woman. Anybody may collect firewood, keep the fire going, make tea, wash up etc. There are no set tasks, no fixed hours to get food ready, to eat. It is an anarchic life style, there being no organisation and no hierarchy. Actions are self motivated. There are no controls, roles or duties, no definition of rights, and a rejection of the values of a patriarchal system, and thereby woman's traditional roles. The anti-nuclear protest, is thus also a protest against the patriarchal system. Women at Greenham Common are also working through centuries of social expectations and stereotypes as they search for new ways to live, to relate, to discover basic truths. This is one side of the social coin, the other being the values expressed on the base militarism and dominance through hierarchy and discipline, and offshoot of the patriarchal system.

Being in an all women's peace camp, sharing its trials and triumphs makes it a very emotional place to be in, and so barriers that all human beings have, break down. If there were an all men's peace camp men would become softer and less competitive; the patriarchal system would begin to crack and the world to change.

The contradictions in our society are very sharply

felt at Greenham Common. Newbury is a suburban area. At the heart of the American base is the American military personnel with their Control Tower, and their missiles, symbols of military domination, i.e., power and force without participation. This bastion of power is surrounded by "weak women", the "second Sex". The women's camp symbolises an openness, a search for self determination and liberation through nonviolence. Lesbians and heterosexuals, punks and mainstream feminists live in harmony at Greenham Common. This is not only a contrast and a challenge to the lifestyle on the base, but also to the rest of society.

It is the belief of Greenham Common women that peace-making cannot be left to someone else, as there is no one else; and that individuals can form massive collective strength as some Greenham women were drawn to the Group to establish Trust between the US and the USSR in Moscow. They believe in the rights of citizens to make peace on their own terms empowered by their spirit and vision.

In the spring of '83, Greenham women visited the USSR and met the Russian Trust Group holding with them a peace picnic. Anti-nuclear placards were hung and people talked of the importance of independent grassroots peace initiatives between people of East and West. Soviet police were so aghast at such an audacious gathering that they watched for two hours before breaking up the picnic. Subsequently Trust Group members in Russia on hearing of mass arrests of Greenham women took the great risks of participating in eight peaceful protests before the British Embassy in Moscow and of writing to Margaret Thatcher.

And so "the women's peace encampment at Greenham Common blends women's issues and peace issues so closely that they become almost impossible to separate. In their exploration towards an alternative approach to societal structures and in their total rejection of the dominant culture Greenham women are making up for years of confinement and constraints. The historical lack of experience did not mean a lack of hardship, or of the need

to endure inspite of inequities in a world that has never valued women as full participants in society. As they protest the presence of Cruise Missiles and, by extension, the militarism of the society as a whole, as that militarism is manifested inside the fence at Greenham, the women are claiming control over their lives. By their nightly forays in to the base through holes they have cut in the fence, they not only mock all claims to security, but they challenge the seriousness of the sacred cows of our civilisation."<sup>4</sup>

Every last Friday of the month women meet at Greenham to spend the day in prayer. On Christmas night fifty thousand women held hands forming a ring around the base, praying that people open their hearts to permit the Prince of peace to be born again amidst them. Many of the peace campers are non-practising christians. The usual practice of religion in a ritualistic manner, with little or no relevance to life issues, and the functioning of the Christian Churches often in an institutionalised bureaucratic manner, and not as an open serving community, alienates them from religion and church.

Women's issues and peace issues are blended in a spirituality that is in contrast with this age of materialism and consumerism, resulting from capitalism, which again is an offshoot of a patriarchal culture.

One sees in the Greenham women a radical and single-minded commitment, so out of place in the world of today with its stress on sensual satisfaction and the immediate. The insecurity of their life styles — living in benders with dead rats and excrement thrown at them, with constant eviction, with no toilets and at having to dig pits for themselves, the severity of the British winter, constant legal charges often concerted, harsh sentences passed on them, having surrendered jobs and family life with the security and comfort of home, living in a state of nonviolent non-aggressive protest and challenge in sharing and solidarity, with women of different ages and beliefs, thereby pointing to new values and new ways of

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4. "Those Amazing Women" *ibid* p. 5



giving — is there not in all this the detachment of evangelical poverty, the freedom and availability of religious chastity, and of obedience to a greater call? Surrendering oneself for others to prevent the holocaust of a nuclear war, to build a new world in which men and women can share in the dignity and freedom of the children of God, is that not a living in hope and joyful expectation of bringing to fulfilment the Kingdom of Christ on earth?

Judith Siqueira

## **Women Theologising: the Story of Story-Telling**

The Minjung theologians from Korea began a few years ago a new theological approach by delving into little known folk stories to draw from them theological insights that are far reaching but also experiential — lending support to the existential life struggles of common people. This theological approach was received, when it first began, with hesitation and scepticism. But then, particularly liberation theologians from Asia and other parts of the world discovered the value of this method of theologising and attempts were made to emulate this model.

The rationale for this approach in Minjung theology was that, "Minjung theologians had to articulate the groans of the Minjung in Korea. As they told the stories of Minjung, they learned not only how to look at the society and the world from the perspective of the Minjung but also how to tell these stories from a sociological point of view. As

Minjung theologians told these stories in a socio-political-economic language, they found themselves in the midst of socio-political praxis"<sup>1</sup>.

Critics of the "story-telling approach of Minjung theologians fail to recognise that the inspiration for this methodology came from Christ the story teller who through his parables and "The Kingdom of God is like this" stories, evokes imagery that is both powerful and filled with eternal truths for all times.

In this article I will focus on how theologising activity of women has, over the centuries, been based on a story telling model. My strongest remembrances of my grandmother has not been that 70 or 80 years ago she became one of the first women doctors in India. Nor that she went to England in the early years of this century, after the birth of her first son (my father), to get two prestigious post graduate degrees in medicine. My memories of her are around that little altar in her home, where we sat on the floor around her, in wrapt attention, as she told us stories of Biblical characters and stories of her life . . . with her we wept and with her we laughed. But with her stories and simple theology, she established in me a strong Christian foundation, which in spite of its occasional meandering, has led me on in my journey of faith and hope.

Perhaps most men and women of faith would have had, if not a grandmother then a mother, a sister or a teacher who had this impact on their lives, in the tradition of Timothy, who, Paul implies, was taught his faith by his grandmother Lois and mother Eunice (II Tim. 1:5).

This story telling tradition has been kept partially alive through the centuries in spite of the pressures of a scientific world which in its frenzy, in its dependence on reason over and above feeling and in its dependence on the electronic media, has taken away from women much

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1. Such Kwang-sun David:

'A Theology by Minjung' in *Theology by the People*, Ed. Amirtham. Samuel; Pobee John S; World Council of Churches, Geneva, 1986, p. 70

of this privileged theological power, denying to children the joy of listening and learning.

### **The new woman speaks**

The women's movement in all parts of the world gave a new impetus to the story telling tradition. Women discovered a new power in being able to share with each other their everyday experiences of pain or of joy. Nelle Morton talks of this when she describes the rising woman consciousness. "A new kind of seeing and hearing was beginning to be recognised by one group of women after the other. Once they recognised in themselves a common oppression, they could hear from one another that which many, more astute and intellectual than they, could not hear ... Women standing in need of one another with a lifetime of re-education before them found themselves in a peculiar position to be the recipients of mercy from the least among them. Experiencing grace in this manner has become one of the most powerful liberating forces in the lives of women ... Women came to new speech simply because they were being heard."<sup>2</sup>

This new language gave to women the experience of liberation, the kind of ability to articulate words which normally remained unspoken or suppressed, and the kind of courage to explore the future. It made women recognise themselves as persons of worth, who could take control of their lives and be responsible for themselves and for their sisters. It also gave to women a sense of community, not allowing traditions or existing value systems to isolate them from each other.

Nelle Morton continues: "Every liberation movement rises out of bondage with a new speech on its lips. This has been so with women coming together, seeking to get in touch with our own stories and experiences which we have discovered welling up from within, from underneath, from out of our past, from out of our traditions rather than above ... Women are literally hearing one another

2. Morton Nelle:

The Journey is Home, Beacon Press, Boston, 1985, p. 17.



to speech. But the speech is our speech. It may come out stumblingly or boldly. But it is authentically our own."<sup>3</sup>

Therefore when Sharadamma, a lower middle class woman, breaks out of a culture of silence and speaks not her anger when her 18 year old daughter is murdered for want of adequate dowry, we recognise in her a new consciousness. By telling and retelling her story of untold suffering and blatant injustice; her pain (which will never leave her) is transformed into political power which she uses to organise other women. Together they became a volatile social force to challenge all that oppresses women and all other oppressed groups.

What emerges is a communal social ethic which is built on what Rosemary Radford Reuther calls "communal personhood"<sup>4</sup>. Women by belonging to a sister group discover through their personal stories the source of women's failures and successes and the source of their united power. This communal social ethic works for the abolition of social patterns of domination and subjugation and challenges not only male/female hierarchical relationships but all systems of domination, be they based on class, caste, community, religion, race, tribe or gender. This has created in India, the climate not only for the growth of an autonomous women's movement in the 1970's - a fresh wave in the women's movement - but for the growing validity of this movement as a political force working in solidarity with all oppressed groups struggling to be heard from the fringes of our society. It has also given to women the ability to experiment with relationships built not on systems of competition and individualism but on new forms of shared power.

### **Liberation theology from women's perspective**

Women theologians, who write from a liberation perspective, who have emerged in this century, have

3. Morton Nelle:

Ibid. p. 55

4. Radford Reuther Rosemary in "Motherearth and Megamachine" Womanspirit Rising, Ed. Christ Carol P. and Plaskow Judith, Harper and Row Publishers, San Francisco; 1979, p 51

affirmed the power of "story telling" as the strongest expression of women's experience. Their attempt is to interpret the Bible from the context of women's experience — *their* stories. From the context of women today, they have tried to unearth women's past submerged biblical history. What is becoming obvious is that traditionally, biblical interpretations cannot be value free or objective and depend on prejudices and presuppositions of those who exegete them. Elizabeth Schussler Fiorenza, writes: "Scholars not only translate the New Testament texts into a masculinised language, but also interpret them from a patriarchal perspective"<sup>5</sup>. Thus she holds that in the selective recording of Jesus' acts and times they lost many stories that in their minds did not appear to be important. If in this twentieth century those who caution against the ordination of women argue that it could come as a stumbling block for unity talks among various Christian traditions, in the second century perhaps the Christian Fathers played down the role of women in the Christian community in order not to be ridiculed as belonging to an effeminate religion! Scholars have unearthed how the break away groups, e.g., Gnostics and Montanists have accorded to women a greater role in early christian history.

"If we take into consideration all the circumstances influencing New Testament authors, we can easily see that they transmit only a fraction of the possibly rich tradition on the role of women in the ministry of Jesus and in the earliest Christian communities. Most of the genuine Christian "her story" is therefore probably lost. We cannot reasonably expect to find extensive documentation for the role of women in early Christianity. The few, but remarkable, surviving traces have to be recaptured not only from the bias of contemporary interpreters but also sifted out from patriarchal records of the New Testament authors themselves."<sup>6</sup>

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5. Schussler Fiorenza Elizabeth in "Women in the Early Christian Movement"

Womanspirit Rising, Ibid. p. 86

6. Ibid. p. 87

A feminist hermeneutics of suspicion has therefore emerged that, on the basis of a new understanding of the liberating possibilities of the gospel, challenges society which has so devalued women's labour, their sexuality and their dignity as human persons. Women have also realised that church dogmas, doctrines, theology, ecclesiastical practices, liturgies, language and symbols have all been formulated out of male experiences. There is a growing consciousness that women's presence in past biblical and church history has been erased or has remained unspoken. "One is not even able to remark upon or notice women's absence, since women's silence and absence is the norm."<sup>7</sup>

From the depth of women's stories of everyday joys and sorrows, triumphs and defeats we can draw a tapestry of theological thinking which is contextual and is based on a community of struggle for humanhood. Interpretation is understood as an act of commitment to the struggles for life. Through a process of intersection between women's own experiential stories and the liberative stands in the ancient biblical stories, "Feminist and liberation interpreters struggle critically with the texts, using the best resources available to understand the message in the light of the biblical horizons of promise, as well as the contemporary situation"<sup>8</sup>.

At the IV Assembly of the All India Council of Christian Women in September-October last year, we grappled with this very question. We listened to the stories of women, in the church and outside, and in the growing women's movement, all in the context of the theme "In Christ: Power of Women." Women have been inspired to go back to the Jesus movement to search within its egalitarian and inclusive framework the space they need to grow to full humanity. This "In Christ" experience, Samuel Rayan described at the Assembly as "more than new

7. Radford Reuther Rosemary in "A Method of Co-Relation", *Feminist Interpretation of the Bible*, Ed. Letty Russell, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1985 p. 113

8. Russell Letty in "Feminist Interpretation of the Bible", *Ibid.* p. 17



spiritual attitudes, more than a new frame of mind, and much more than interior experiences. It means putting on Christ, becoming a new human being, a new creation... all the antagonisms and discriminations of the old world are abolished and new relationships of freedom, equality and fellowship are established. The power of women "In Christ" is "the power of solidarity with all the oppressed of the earth and all the downtrodden in history"<sup>9</sup>.

He called on women to be like the woman who searched till she found her lost coin. "No one but you can recover your lost coin, your lost story, your submerged history."<sup>10</sup> As women share their stories, painful or happy, they begin this search so that they can discover the riches of their mind and heart, their personal worth and the worth of their sisters and all those who struggle to become subjects of their own history.

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9. Rayan Samuel:

"In Christ: Power of Women", Stree Reflect Series 4, An All India Council of Christian Women Publication, 1986, p. 20-21

10. Ibid. p. 20

## The Glass Window

Sarah was the first to wake up every morning. On a Sunday, she was up an hour earlier, at 5.00 a.m., to get everything done so that she could be in church on time. She hurriedly prepared the breakfast and part of the lunch too. Every Sunday and Saturday, this extra effort was necessary so that she could get her chores done to go to church. On Saturdays it was to help with the polishing of the brass and silver, decorating the altar with flowers and supervising the cleaning of the church. On Sundays she went earlier so that she with the other women could make ready everything for the cup of coffee they served the congregation, after the morning service.

She worked extra hard because she was now on the pastorate committee of the church and this meant extra responsibilities and meetings at the most inconvenient times. There were so few women on the Committee that she dared not miss even one meeting. Having the meetings after the service on Sunday mornings was convenient for the men — they did not have much else to do on a Sunday morning. And, as usual the convenience of the men was considered to be more important.

She was making the *chappaties* for breakfast.

"Mariam, wake up. Come here and help me with this", she called out to her 11 year old daughter, the only one whom she could call on for help. Hearing their voices, her husband got out of bed. She turned to get his coffee, but in the process the *chappati* got burnt. Mariam who was washing the vegetables near the tap outside was unable to get to the stove on time.

"Can you do nothing right? her husband yelled at

her. "Burnt *chappaties* for breakfast is all we get in this house!" She rushed to the stove after thrusting the coffee into his hands. The *chappati* was by that time beyond redemption.

She gritted her teeth and waited for the inevitable tirade... "What is the use of all your work in the church, if you cannot take care of the house properly? I am very proud of you and all you do for the church — but you must get your priorities right! A woman's first place is in the home. Charity begins at home... Are you listening to me? It's all very well..." And so he went on and on.

Sarah had learnt how to ignore all he said. It hurt her deeply but she was not going to react. She must only learn how to work harder, she decided. She set the table and woke up her son James, to get ready for church, she then started dusting and cleaning the sitting room. The big glass window, of which her husband was so proud she polished with extra vigour. She rubbed it so hard, almost as if she would peel off a layer of the glass. It was a symbol of her resolve to keep the house even cleaner. She must not disturb the peace of the house.

And so the week went by... cooking, cleaning, dusting, washing and keeping the glass window impeccably clean. One last rub and she would be ready for the Saturday evening tasks in the church. Today, they also had a Women's Fellowship meeting. She yelled instructions to her daughter, to hold the fort while she was away... "Don't forget to heat up the curry, if *appa* wants to eat. You know how he hates cold food, Mariam. Remember to give James the fruit in the fridge. Now, don't lose yourself in your book. You are a woman now and you must learn your responsibilities".

"Hmm" murmured Mariam, turning over the page of the book she was reading.

'Mariam, I am speaking to you? Oh no, where is that pin? Mariam, are you listening to me? If the *dhoby* woman comes remember to give her the clothes, I have counted them and tied them up in a bundle.'



"Hmm", was all Mariam would reply.

"If appa wants a cup of coffee give it to him. There is a flask full. Mariam, are you listening to me? Oh no I'll be late."

"Yes, ma, yes" Mariam replied, her book absorbing her fully.

\* \* \*

"Ah, there you are Sarah, we were wondering where you were", said Mrs. Peters as Sarah rushed into the church.

"Sorry I am late, shall we start, I think the stained glass window needs polishing. Both of you do the altar, I'll start on that." She climbed on to a stool and carefully polished the window.

The women chatted as they worked. A whole week of news of themselves, their families and their friends had to be caught up with. Helen, a young woman who had recently joined the Women's Fellowship spoke very little. Sarah noticed her sad eyes and made a special effort to draw her out and speak to her.

"How do you manage all the work in the house and be active in the church. I want to devote myself to the church — but my husband doesn't understand. I try to do everything right... but something always goes wrong", said Helen after a little coaxing.

Sarah rubbed on the stain glass window with added vigour and smiled to herself. She finished her work and got down. Putting her arm around the younger woman she said, "Don't despair, my dear sister. Just work harder. We are doing it all for our Lord who cares for us women and needs us".

They moved into the women's fellowship meeting. There was a Bible Study, some hymns and prayers led by one of the women in the group. They then transacted little bits of business, distributing responsibilities for visits to the old people's home, families with someone sick and

Bible readers for the Sunday service. The Treasurer reported that Rs. 3250 was made at the breakfast sale two weeks earlier. It was decided that Rs. 3000 will be given to the Pastor for church repairs (as usual). Mrs. Thangaraj, a committee member, who has been to Bangalore for a vacation, told the group that for the next meeting she had invited a young woman whom she had met, to speak to them. This information was received with mixed feelings.

"What can a young woman say to us?" "Who is she? Is she a good christian?" "That is good news, we will hear something new". "Well... I don't know, let us see..." All their doubts were allayed by Mrs. Thangaraj who assured the group that something good will come of the meeting.

\* \* \*

In the weeks that followed Sarah worked hard both at home and in the church, struggling to see that nothing she says or does disturbs the peace in the home. The glass window in the sitting room and the stained glass window in the church were both kept sparkling clean, of course!

\* \* \*

Jesus' touch healed that bent-over woman at the temple. To Christ it was the woman, the person, that mattered. Christ by his radical action of healing a woman on the Sabbath day, broke not only Sabbatical laws of the time but also broke traditionally held attitudes to women. In spite of the very patriarchal Judaic times in which Jesus lived, he transcended all expectations by recognising this bent-over, despised and rejected woman as "a daughter of Abraham". Christ does this for us. He demands that we like Mary "choose the good part". This implies responsibility and organised strength. This implies that we cannot accept with docility anything that denies or diminishes our humanhood. This implies that we are called to do more than traditionally expected tasks — we are called to co-create with God a new world. For this we derive power from Christ".

This was the message of the young woman speaker on that Saturday afternoon. This was the first time the women heard someone speak this way. Her talk created quite a stir, there was heated discussion and many questions were raised — but there was no doubt that she had challenged the women.

"I think we need to explore the Bible further from this new perspective opened to us", said Mrs. Thangaraj "Yes", yes. . . " agreed a chorus of voices.

"The main thing to keep in mind is that our task is to give a helping hand, just like Jesus did, to all the women bent over by poverty, tradition or custom in our land, so that, we could all stand upright and praise God", concluded the speaker.

\* \* \*

Sarah was also deeply challenged by this young woman. Could life go on in this mechanical manner? What did being a co-creator with God really demand from her? Was a sparkling stained glass window proof of her love for the church? Was this adequate testimony of her devotion to a Liberator God?

The next pastorate committee meeting of the church several weeks later, saw Sarah alert and active. There were many things happening there she just could not accept. Suddenly, she was angry that the men dominated all the discussions. She was furious that the pastor's wife's attempts to intervene in the discussion regarding the educational scholarship of the sexton's daughter were thwarted by the pastor's, "You don't speak here, my dear. You don't know anything about finances. Leave it to us to make the decision". She was even more disturbed that the contribution from the Women's Fellowship was taken so much for granted, that not even a word of thanks was expressed. She wondered why the women have no say in how the money is spent. It is the women who raise the money, and then they are told that they know nothing of finances! Something was wrong. Sarah was worried.



Why was she reacting this way? Is this correct? But then was she doing what is good in the eyes of God if she keeps silent?... Many questions clouded her mind.

\* \* \*

Sarah continued to work very hard in the house-seeing to it that her schedule in the church did not disturb the home. The glass window, in the home, she polished with extra care. One day at dinner she spoke of the young woman and the challenge she had given to them. Her husband was very happy, he agreed with what the woman said. "Why should not women too play an equal role in working for a world of God's shalom?" he asked. They had a fruitful discussion and the matter was closed.

\* \* \*

Another Saturday came around and Sarah was up early to have everything in order before she went to church to accomplish her weekly tasks. They were also going to have a business meeting to take a re-look at the structure and finances of the Women's Fellowship. They felt that there was need for them to get involved in something creative and to use the money in a better way. A slum project to educate children was suggested; setting up a legal aid programme for women was another idea; starting a health programme for slum women was also thought of... Anyway, this meeting would make that decision.

"James, run over to the shop and get me a dozen eggs. Mariam, tidy up your room and come and help me now. Mariam, don't forget all my instructions regarding *appa's* dinner, I may be late today. James, go to the shop soon... get me half a kilo of salt when you are there. Hurry Mariam, I am already late...". Sarah, rushed around desperately trying to get everything done on time. Was that her husband? He was home early? Why, she wondered.

"Sarah, where are you? I have invited my friends over for dinner. I have bought the chicken on my way home. I am sure you will cook it for us..."

"But my meeting..." Sarah faltered.

"Oh, that is not important. When will you ever get your priorities right ! Charity begins at home. A woman's first place is in the home... you'll just have to forget your meeting..."

Sarah stood there speechless. Something snapped inside her. How long could this go on? In her hand she held a ladle, which she had been using to stir the curry. She did not know what happened to her, she was too angry to think. She flung the ladle with great force. It went spinning in the air and crashed into the glass window, which splintered into thousands of little pieces.

Madras

Aruna Gnanadason

## The Pain of the Law

I do not know how many women have come to this chamber seeking legal advice. Always filled with fear and insecurity, bewildered by the way life had caught them unawares. Their simple dreams of a happy family life filled with the laughter of children and love shattered...Unbearable suffering, cruelties and, many a time, threat to their lives compel them to go in search of a lawyer. Most women prefer to come to the house. Their middle-class upbringing has taught them that the courts are for criminals, not for respectable young women brought up to make homes. In the court they find the corridors filled with women, like them. At first they are embarrassed. Then they learn that they are not alone...

There was the young research student who discovered her husband was a schizophrenic. Her father had found out this fact before the marriage, but he said he had given his word. And for a Rajput honour is the essence of life. Kanta, a young mother of two small children had been deserted by her husband. Her father wanted to know how he could compel the husband to take her back, even if it should mean that she was murdered...Shahjehan Begum wanted to file a private complaint against the in laws of her 20 year old daughter who had been burnt to death by them. The police had refused to register a case. Savitiri had walked 15 kilometres home in the mountains during the inauspicious months after her mother in law had tried to poison her. Vinita, the middleclass housewife had to give up her bank job because of her husband's insistence and now he refused to give her any money. Beautiful Anjali had defied orthodoxy to marry Anwar, but her mother filed a false affidavit saying her daughter had already been married...Lalita came when she was six months pregnant wanting to file a petition for maintenance after her husband had thrown acid on her...Shobha loved a man who made her pregnant and who married someone else, because his mother insisted he should bring a dowry...Vimala was married to an alcoholic who was often found in drains with dogs licking his face. Vimala suffered silently because she feared that if she left him he might claim custody of their son. Eighteen year old Bano came with her burqa clad mother to say that her husband had deserted her and had filed a suit for divorce in a small town in Uttar Pradesh. Nafisa came from Moradabad to ask for help for her sister whose husband had beaten her and shoved an iron rod into her vagina.....Forty-five year old Nalini said her husband had walked out after 25 years of marriage to live with his sister in law. Manjuri had returned to Nari Niketan with her five year old daughter because her husband said he could not live with a prostitute. Why did he marry a girl from the Nari Niketan in the first place? Maria, a sixty-five year old school teacher from Kerala was thrown out of her house where she had lived all her life, a good part of it looking



after her ailing parents. Her brothers said under the law she had no right to the house...

Each one wanted legal advice. The law seemed complicated and beyond comprehension. There was the dread of facing hostile judges, the gruelling cross examination of Hindi film style, the harassment of the long waits in the corridors of the courts, and, of course, they were worried about the expenses. It was the fear of the unknown and the uncertainty of getting justice at all. But they had come at a moment of their lives when there seemed no choice...

They began by sharing their experiences. At first with shame and guilt. Then as they realized they were not being judged they opened up. They learned to be angry. Many decided not to take the injustice any more and with the help of women's organization they cut short the court process. They went to their in-laws house and took their belongings by force or beat up the husband and blackened his face. Then there was always the complicated question of ethics. Can we use the same dehumanized means as was used against us? What was the place of vengeance in the process of our liberation?

Some women decided they could not fight. They resigned themselves to the suffering in the hope they could get a bit of peace. A few decided to fight it out in the courts.

I remember Savitri. At first she would not speak. As her brother told her story, she listened staring at me with an expressionless face. Perhaps she wondered how this professional lawyer could ever understand the pain of an illiterate village woman who had shown rare courage by walking out in the middle of the night during the period when the moon was waning and it was unlucky to go to her parents' home.

Savitri and I prepared for the examination-in-chief. We began the rehearsals. She began to enjoy herself. It was as if she had the main role in a play, and the success of the play depended on her. For the first time

she felt a sense of self importance. We began:

"What is your name ?"

She looked at me in total amazement, "Didi, you know my name is Savitri!"

I told her that the law required that we should pretend that I did not. She was amused.

"What is your husband's name ?"

"Govind Singh."

"Where does he work?"

"Where does he work? What did you tell me to say, Didi..." She realized she had blundered.

"Gujarat Transport company at Surat." She looked proud that she had been able to pronounce "Transport Company".

We continued. Finally the day arrived. We walked to court. I was nervous. She was supremely confident, in command of the situation. She told me: "Don't worry, Didi. I won't let you down." She did not. She had stood on her toes so as to be seen and stood the cross examination. She won her case.

Whether we won or we lost, it was always our case. We, my client and I, were together facing the situation. Neither of us expected real justice from the courts. And we never got it. But like Savitri each one grew stronger and more confident as we learned to cope with the law — a law designed not to protect us, but to help those who oppressed us. But we learned that we were not alone. And that became the source of our inner strength. However painful the experience we shared, the important thing was that we shared it. Even if we lost the case, the moral victory was ours because we learned that the law is based on injustice. We became better equipped to fight our oppression, to defy the society which had been so cruel. A few lines of a poem on a poster brought out on International Women's Day put it beautifully:

My daughters shall not  
Grow up beautiful  
But they will inherit  
The wealth of my story

Neither will they be happy.  
For the hour of their days  
Shall be counted  
By ten times the troubles I now bear.  
But they will not weep.  
Nay, theirs shall be the countenance  
Of firm defiance.

56 Munirka Enclave,  
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Nandita Haksar

## Women and the Media

I joined The Times of India as a trainee journalist in 1974 — a year before the UN-ordained International Year of Women. As trainees our preoccupations centred on how best to succeed in the male world of journalism, on male terms. Every time one of our male colleagues did an investigative story and got his by-line into the paper, it was a personal defeat for us. It meant that we women did not have the right "sources" to cultivate, or display the necessary tenacity to get a "scoop". To make matters worse, the chief reporter thought he was doing us a favour by marking us for "safe" functions — a Rotary Club meeting or a fashion show!

As the years went by, as the women's Decade progressed, a few facts made themselves felt in our consciousness, both as women and as journalists. Reports of stove deaths that told an explosive story of greed and torture within the four walls of homes, rapes that were committed by the very people who were meant to protect women from such crimes, women dying of septicaemia on hospital beds after poorly performed sterilisations organised



by the Government — they all told the same story. And horrifying as the facts were, they did not merit more than the token inch or two in our national dailies, coupled with innocuous headlines like 'Another Woman Dies of Burns, or 'Gang-rape of Minor'. After all for the honourable men of the press, trends in the bullion market or Pele's visit to Calcutta was more news-worthy. I remember, even as the full implications of the Mathura Rape Case made itself felt, a senior editor, male of course, dismissed a serious analysis on rape written by one of us with the words, "Put it in the women's section of the Sunday pages". The message was loud and clear: rape was a woman's problem and, as far as the newspapers were concerned, it should stay a woman's problem.

So we learnt our first lessons. To be critical of what we saw and read and to try and fight as much as we can this conspiracy of silence. How are we, as women, being portrayed in the media? This question assumed importance as we began to realise how these very images projected on a screen or painted on a hoarding; drawn in a cartoon or printed in a book went to reinforce values that were almost always false and sometimes patently dangerous.

We started perceiving the interlinkages. Surely there was a connection between increasing dowry deaths and ads in newspapers and magazines which blatantly promoted products of Atlas Cycles, Usha Sewing Machines or HMT Watches as excellent marriage "gifts". And when rape is portrayed by a Hindi film director on a 70 mm screen in technicolor in such a way as to titillate the onlooker it is singularly vile because it transforms an unspeakable barbarity perpetrated on women into something glamorous and therefore worthy of emulation. The same culture that produces a primer which reads, 'Papa goes to work, mama stays at home', also produces TV ads which show women washing mountains of clothes with a smile and with their nail polish intact. The mind-deadening nature of household routine is thus glossed over, the stereotyping never questioned. When a photograph of a bare-chested

woman is used to sell a bottle of brandy, it only reflects how much women are used as sex symbols in a society which commodifies everything, including women's bodies.

These realisations changed our ways of seeing. In the '80s, as the UN Women's Decade came to a close, women all over the country made conscious attempts to influence and change mainstream media and also carve alternative forms of expression for themselves. *Manushi*, the first feminist magazine in the country, made its appearance in 1980. A few years later India got her first women's publishing house — Kali for Women. Commercial women's magazines, even while being bound to carry the mandatory fashion, cockery and craft pages, tried to bring important social issues to their readers. Women film critics started analysing the images of women in films in a much more rigorous manner and women film makers came out with some incisive films on women. Even the sacred editorial pages of our leading newspapers were not immune to this "liberating" influence.

This was certainly not the mood of the unquestioning '60s and early '70s — there was a new wind blowing. Women's committees to monitor the portrayal of women in the media have recently been set up in various cities and women's groups have taken up these issues as well. No longer is anything taken for granted — even legislation which ostensibly seeks to "prohibit" the "indecent representation of women". When the Indecent Representation of Women (Prohibition Bill) of 1986 was tabled in the Rajya Sabha, women activists all over the country found the definition of what constitutes indecent representation in the Bill inadequate and distorting. They were not prepared to accept one more piece of shabby legislation conjured up only to buttress the image of the government and little else.

One hopes that this critical climate will in the years to come provide a basis for ushering in deep-rooted changes in the way men perceive women and in the way we perceive ourselves. This is the age of mass communj-

cation and we, as women, have to learn how to project the data we have collected and the experiences we have gone through in a powerful way. We have to produce new knowledge and we have to do it in new ways.

Pamela Philipose

## Being and Becoming

What you are is God's gift to you; what you become is your gift to God — this is someone's wisdom. That someone was obviously not a woman.

What am I Lord? Who am I? You have given me an identity at birth as a female. Was it indeed a gift? Look around you, Lord; look at all my sisters — mothers, aunts, daughters and nieces. Are they, as women, as females, gifts to themselves?

I am Mary. The mother of Jesus was Mary. I will not be a mother for a while. I just had an abortion. This new test called amniocentesis showed that my baby, inside my womb, was a little girl. It was a terrible decision. After waiting four years, finally I got pregnant. The cruel taunts of my sisters-in-law and mother-in-law about my barrenness were finally stopped. But my husband listens to his mother. He did not want our eldest child to be a female. So he said it was best to get the abortion done and try again. Oh, Mary, mother of Jesus, why wasn't Jesus a female? Life would have been glorious for us women. Now I am empty — barren again. Will there ever be a male child in my womb? Will you give that as a gift to me, God? That's the only thing that will redeem me

as a respectable person in my family — it will be my ticket to a better life. How ironical! How will more sons be born if I don't give daughters to bear them? Mary, mother of Jesus, you bore a son without male help at all! Can men beget sons without the womb and breasts of a woman? Don't these men think? Mary, mother of Jesus, pray for us women — we are not sinners so much as sinned against.

Martha is my name. God called me to serve in the Church. God bestowed God's spirit upon me and sent me for theological training. I have offered myself for the fully ordained ministry in the Church. But the Church gives primacy to the physiological accident that my hormones do not grow whiskers on my face. My God-given skin is too smooth! Was the bestowal of a set of hormones meant for the growth and nourishment of a life within me a gift or a curse? I have become, through diligent study and hard work, a fully trained ministerial candidate, but the ministerial committees and pastorate committees reject me because I just am not capable of growing a beard. Oh well ...

"Prof." they call me who was baptized Rukmani. I'm the only woman on the teaching faculty of a small college. I love my teaching, but there is no opportunity for give and take with my colleagues on my subject — I am not one of the boys. I yearn for intellectual camaraderie. I am middle-aged, married, with grown children. Why would I be a seductive threat to any one? They cannot or will not see me as another human person, with the same intellectual thirst as themselves, but only as a woman, a sexual being. Would it help to wear shirt and trousers, I wonder. At faculty meetings any suggestion from me is usually ignored. After five minutes exactly the same idea in exactly the same words is accepted as an excellent one from a male colleague. Do I speak in tongues? Am I invisible or inaudible? I retreat into putting forth my ideas in writing under a male *nom de plume*. This is my angry gift to God, what I have become.

Kamala is not a 'Christian' name. It means, lotus, the



flower incorporated into the symbol of my Church. I am a 'church worker'. I have been a voice crying in the wilderness of church politics for the constitutionally enjoined proportion of female representation on committees and councils. My erstwhile male colleagues name a young woman to a committee, count her twice, as female and as youth, since the constitution sets guidelines for a definite percentage in each category? Would they do the same with a young man? No, because there is no limit set on the percentage of males. This is the Church's gift to the God who, (it has no hesitation in affirming,) created male and female in God's own image. This is what the Church has become over the years, an entrenched, power-mongering, political body where Christ the head has been spirited away to heaven and impaled on pious pronouncements and sacerdotal definitions about the gender of the Saviour of the world.

I am Sara, just a housewife, beginning to feel my years. I ride the bus to market everyday. Sometimes, if a young man is sitting in the only available woman's seat, I ask him to move. I used to be so very modest, humble and self-giving, not wanting the young men to stand, but preferring to put up with the discomfort of standing. But I am tired nowadays. The other day a young man retorted, "Would you get up for me if you were sitting on the other side?" This made me angry and hurt. I shot back, "If it said 'Men only' on that side I wouldn't demean myself by sitting there. Do you realize why separate seats are provided for women? It is because so many of you are beastly and uncivilized always trying to touch a strange woman next to you." He moved to the back of the bus. My daughter says she keeps an open pin in her hand in a crowded bus and steps hard on toes when she feels herself being pawed or rubbed against by such beasts.

My mother called me Ramayee. Yes we all marched one and a half years ago to the Collector's Office. They called it rights of women. There are no rights or-lefts. The B. D. O. used to come once in a long while and tell us we are doing this, we are doing that. Did anybody

ever ask us what we women needed and wanted? Now, he said 'a gobar gas plant'. We thought, who is going to buy us the stoves? But I did not have to think even. Yes, Yes, the gobar, geebar all came. It is over there... near the tiled house of the Panchayat Chairman, the landlord, and the merchant who has the only store here. They have gobar. We continue our old ways, collecting dry sticks and thorn for the hearth. Sometimes I am gone all morning, have to go farther every day. What? It is the same story with the water pump. It is only for them - they built a wall around it. We go to the well or the tank, like I have done since I was twelve and my mother did and my grandmother before her. They say, "Modern, modern". Where is "modern" for us women, I ask you?

Made in your image and likeness are the likes of her, God! These are my sisters, my kith and kin. Did you indeed bestow femininity on them as a gift, Lord? or as a curse? Tell me Lord, speak to me.

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Padmasani J. Gallup

## The Blood of a Woman\*

I am a woman  
and my blood  
cries out:  
Who are you  
to deny life  
to the life givers ?  
Each one of you  
has come from the womb  
but none of you  
can bear woman  
when she is strong  
and joyful and competent.  
You want our tears  
to clamour for protection.  
Who are you  
to protect us  
from yourselves ?  
I am a woman  
and my monthly bloodshed  
makes me aware  
that blood  
is meant for life.  
It is you  
who have invented  
those lethal machines  
spreading death:  
Three kilotons  
of explosives  
for every human being  
on earth.  
I am a woman

and the blood  
of my abortions  
is crying out.  
I had to kill  
my child  
because of you  
who deny work  
to me  
so that i cannot  
feed it.  
I had to kill my  
child  
because i am  
unmarried  
and you would  
harrass me  
to death  
if i defy  
your norms.  
I am a woman  
and the blood  
of being raped  
is crying out.  
This is how you  
keep  
your power intact,  
how you make me  
tremble  
when i go out  
at night.

This is how you keep  
me in place  
in my house where  
you rape me again,  
I am not taking this  
any longer.

I am a woman  
and the blood  
of my operations  
is crying out.  
Even if i am a nun  
you still use my body  
to make money  
by giving me  
hysterotomy  
when i don't need it.  
My body is in the  
clutches  
of husbands, policemen,  
doctors, pimps,  
there is no end to my  
alienation.

I am a woman  
and the blood  
of my struggles  
is crying out.  
Yes, my comrades,  
you want us  
in the forefront  
because you have learnt  
you cannot do  
without us.  
You need us  
in the class struggle  
as you need us  
in bed

and to cook  
your grub  
to bear  
your children  
to dress  
your wounds.  
You will celebrate  
women's day  
like mothers day  
garlands  
for our great  
supporters.

Where would we be  
without our women?  
I am a woman  
and the blood  
of my sacrifices  
cries out to the sky  
which you call  
heaven.

I am sick of you  
priests  
who have never bled  
and yet say :  
This is my body  
given up for you  
and my blood  
shed for you  
drink it.  
Whose blood  
has been shed  
for life  
since eternity ?  
I am sick of you  
priests  
who rule the  
garbagriha,



who adore the womb  
 as a source of life  
 and keep me shut out  
 because my blood  
 is polluting.  
 I am a woman  
 and i keep bleeding  
 from my womb  
 but also from my heart  
 because it is difficult  
 to learn to hate  
 and it might not help  
 if i hate you.  
 I still love  
 my little son  
 who bullies his sister  
 he has learnt it outside,  
 how do i stop him?  
 I still love  
 my children's father  
 because he was there  
 when i gave birth.  
 I still long  
 for my lovers touch  
 to break the spell  
 of perversion  
 which has grown  
 like a wall  
 between women and men.  
 I still love  
 my comrades in arms  
 because they care  
 for others who suffer  
 and there is hope

that they give their bodies  
 in the struggle for life  
 and not just for power.  
 But i have learned  
 to love my sisters.  
 We have learned  
 to love one another.  
 We have learned  
 even to respect  
 ourselves.  
 I am a woman  
 and my blood  
 cries out.  
 We are millions  
 and strong together.  
 You better hear us  
 or you may be doomed.

Gabriele Dietrich

\* Poems by Gabriele Dietrich are published by  
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 Tilakwadi Extension, Belgaum 590 006  
 and are available at Rs. 10 plus postage

## Gender

At four a. m.  
drowsy with sleep  
I sipped tea  
in the station  
when someone  
caught hold  
of my arm.  
I shook him off  
swiftly  
then saw  
he was blind  
wanting to go  
to a cigarette stall.  
Not knowing the place  
i shoved him on  
to somebody else  
unable  
not to feel  
guilty.  
Later,  
seeing him  
roaming  
it struck me  
how no blind  
woman  
could ever  
hang on  
to an unknown  
man  
asking him  
to be taken  
anywhere.

## Listening, Looking, Thinking

Listening to winds: east wind, west wind,  
the wind from the South, new winds, an  
awakened wind . . . discovering that in real politik  
it might suggest North, South, Communist,  
Capitalist; South-third world, South —  
Women . . .

Looking at the third world: at its wars;  
at South Africa, at the war against the  
blacks; the genocide in Sri Lanka; the  
gynocide of women; the war against women . . .  
Considering our choices in the third world,  
the crisis of our choices, the consequences;  
feeling the powerlessness of the empoverished;  
understanding that 'progress', 'Science',  
'development' means starvation for millions  
of people; an escalating armament race,  
national security ideologies, nuclear doctrines,  
militarizing our structures, militarizing our  
minds; a continuum of violence for the women.  
Thinking of Bhopal: Knowing new deaths, new  
despair . . .

Realizing that thinking is not separate from  
being; theory from practice, poverty from  
the poor; Life is not distanced from  
Knowledge, the researcher from the researched,  
the Knower not isolated from the Known.

' . . . . can we tell the dancer from the dance ?'

Going to the women's Day demonstration:  
thinking of all the women 'limping on

the edges of the history of man  
Crippled for centuries . . . dragging the heavy  
emptiness . . . .'

Women, powerless to name the world,  
women without a history  
a history without women:

Walking with women who have found  
the courage to refuse lives of humiliation, of  
degradation; women bursting forth in  
collective expressions of organising for water, wages;  
women understanding in the dailiness of our lives,  
women protesting dowry, purdah, religious laws;  
women struggling for rights to the land,  
women refusing the dogma, the darkness—

Sita speaking !

Women telling our own stories, creating the  
words of our lives;  
finding new rhythms, discovering new roots,  
searching for other frames, other names,

A seed here, a flower there

Watching the cosmic canvas; and anticipating  
the awakened wind; perceiving its stirrings,  
not knowing the direction, not determining  
the texture

Knowing we cannot plan a flower . . .

listening to the awakening wind . . .

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Corrine Kumar D'Souza



## Watchman, How Far Is the Night?

"How long still?... I dream of a husband of my own, and of my own baby", groaned Telma, 18 years, caught in one of the brothels of Bombay.

"Some twelve years ago we came from our tribal village to this city in search of work, so that we might make it possible for our brothers and sisters to study. Now they are married. Our parents still need our little money. We are now 32/34 years old; too late for us to marry. We are *ayas* for life. Who will care for us when we are old or sick?" This is from Valerie, Sangeetha, Goretti...

Watchman, how far is the night?

The night is long...

Women and girls are forced in a variety of ways  
into subhuman life...

They live the question, 'How long still...

How long still will it be night?

They call us domestics, prostitutes, rag-pickers  
living from the call of others.

How long still, Lord, will there be fear,  
and silence, and shame and slavery?

Fear of being on the road,  
fear of being left alone,  
fear of being followed and killed.

Shame because of the names they call us,  
silence because we are nowhere.

Slavery and unreal submissiveness

because we have no other way,  
we have never known another way.

Why are 'they' always and everywhere right?

Why do 'they' speak to us a language we do not know?

Domestics, prostitutes, childworkers, ragpickers...  
We are much more; and different.  
In God's name  
How long still?

The night is long.

Justifications and myths are on the increase.  
On all sides one can hear them:

'— but these girls had nothing at home'.  
'we give them everything'.  
'she can be with us till her marriage'.  
'they must be kept in their place'.

Often I become quiet, silent, when people reinforce myths; when they advise us to be careful, to keep the balance, to see both sides...; when restoration movements spring up to keep everything 'safe'. The secure believer has indeed all the benefit when nothing changes. Every movement at the grassroots will then have a dangerous tint of red, or the sound of radicalism.

The night is long...

but the warmth of solidarity and togetherness sprouts,  
like thousands of mustard seeds,  
in a quiet soil of pain.

When the Ranchi and Orissa girls in Bombay celebrate their harvest feast together, their song, drum and dance say, 'The dawn has come'. With them we keep dreaming that it will come. I experience that it is coming, and at the same time feel it is still a dream, when they return to the daily reality of migrant workers.

The night is long...

but the signs of hope are alive where powerless people come together, share experiences of pain, and struggle, and feel the support of each other.

It is the sprouting of the mustard seed,  
The song of the dying grain of wheat.

The night is long...

and the signs of hope are small and vulnerable points

where the tender wonder grows of a bursting lotus,  
a song in the dark.

You can't make much noise about it, nor expose it  
too much,  
or it dies, killed in the bud.

To say that poor women rise out of the tangle of discrimination is already to let it happen silently,  
while hoping that it *will* happen.

'We do not see our signs...  
and there is none among us  
who knows how long... (Ps 74:9)

The night is long...

But all over our country women start coming together.  
Behold I will bring them from the North country,  
and gather them from the farthest parts of the earth,  
among them the blind and the lame,  
the woman with child and her who is in travail together;  
a great company then shall return here.  
With weeping they shall come,  
and with consolations I will lead them back.  
I will make them walk by brooks of water,  
in a straight path in which they shall not stumble;  
for I am a father.... (Jer 31:8-9)

Statistics and research are important. Facts may be indispensable. But the waiting and longing in the night is still more essential. It cannot be named; it can only be lived; and that is the strength of women. I often wonder at the strength and clarity of simple women, their spontaneous resistance to power, and their hopeful Yes to life.

The secret of women is in the line of their new relationship to things and their capacity to wait.  
(new relationship)

Women experience what happens already as well as the dream that it will happen, as an inner voice of hope.

Women think of themselves in holistic terms,

a oneness of body, mind, heart and spirit. The separation and division of these by our society and church is part of a system of clear and logical thought, part of a hierarchical ordering of things. The new relationship that women contribute is not patriarchy but equality in difference and mutual complementarity.

Sharing and community; making each other free — is what I experience as a new wonder when poor women meet. Sometimes the wonder becomes anger at the sight of what happened and still happens to the poor. Sometimes it becomes hope because I see young girls and women coming finally to believe in themselves. Sometimes it becomes doubt because the dream is so fragile, and oppressive powers are so great and strong. But if there is a place where God lives, suffers, loves and hopes, it is with them and in them.

(capacity to wait)

For women waiting belongs to life as breathing does. Women wait for life, for the baby to be born, they wait for... Their waiting is not passive; it is a life-force, because they wait facing life and the new morning.

Women have the capacity for waiting, not being able to do anything except remain present. As in Ezekiel 37:7 "And you, I have appointed as watchman for the people of Israel, whatever you hear from me, you must tell them in my name." It is a waiting with God's backing, but facing life and people.

And we experience today that women stand with their whole being in the darkness of a night of oppression and discrimination but facing the morning, sure that the dawn is coming. Women's struggles have something of waiting in the night. Sure, there is the utopic language that one day the dawn will come when people from the corner of the street will be called, all, without exception. But this is hoping and dreaming in the night. Words like 'We have found one another, we stand up as one people rising out



of oppression', are cries to keep going.

One day thousands of flowers will blossom where today one flower can grow.

As long as I am buried and turned in on myself, I cannot see the problems and struggles of our times which the Gospel describes and birth-pangs. The night has its own darkness and prevents many of us from seeing.

But together with poor women and girls struggling to free one another and move together, we feel and are sure that the morning is coming.... that it is new like every morning.

"Behold, I am doing a new thing;  
now it springs forth;  
do you not know it? (Isa 43)

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Jeanne Devos

# **Being Conscious and a Woman Late Nineteenth Century Experiences**

**Krubai Satyanadham Ammal  
and her Writings**

Krubai was from a family of early Hindu converts. That she wrote is not surprising because there were others also who were writing around this time. But that she could reflect upon being a woman with such lucidity and frankness makes her an extraordinary writer. Two of her novels were serialised in the Christian College magazine and later brought out as books by the Christian Literature Society. Both the novels, based on her own experiences of life, tell us a lot about what it was to be different in those days.

A short note on her in the published version tells us what, apart from her love of Christianity, was different about Krubai. She was a woman filled with an honest anger and concern regarding the status of women. She used to say: I feel sad that a woman must give up an independent life and mental growth and choose married life, good clothes and adornment as being better. Only after a lot of thinking and consideration could she agree that growth was possible within marriage also. Only after she had convinced herself of this did she agree to marry. The courage in contemplating the marriage system in these dispassionate terms, and the personal sincerity in accepting such a system after due thought make Krubai stand out among the early group of writers. The note describes her as a person who became deeply

contemplative while watching a light cloud, the beautiful light at dusk and the bright sun light during the day. Her sensitivity is reflected in her writings also.

Her novel *Saguna* is autobiographical and in many places her righteous anger about what was happening around her to other women comes through. Her mother was an affectionate person who however thought her eagerness to study was unfeminine. She used to admonish her that after all a woman was finally only going to mind the kitchen; where then was the need for her to be with books all the time? Her brothers used to tease her telling her to get the food ready and then call them. But Saguna of the novel, who was really Krubai, joined her brothers every evening when they studied. In her elder brother's study room an oil lamp was lit in the evenings and they sat around and studied Grammar, Arithmetic, Latin and Geometry. One of her brothers complained to their sister who was in charge of their education that Saguna wanted to be like them. Saguna argued that she was no lesser than they. She also did all the arithmetic that they did. "I will also read and write" she asserted angrily. Even as a young girl she was not swayed by prejudices and needless pride; and discrimination of any kind made her unhappy and angry. Saguna began to stay with an European missionary and her lady companion, and began to study seriously in her teenage. At one point the European missionary's companion referred to an Indian Bible-woman (women who went around trying to spread the message of Christ) and said that such women need not be allowed into the living room. They should be spoken to in the kitchen. Saguna flared up and said that they were nobodies in this country. The Indians were the real lords here. Then, overcome by her anger, she burst into tears and was willing to give up her education and go away until the European missionary assured her that she was not going to send any Indian Bible-woman to the kitchen.

As a young girl Saguna attended a party. A doctor there told her that all women need not get educated and

have a career. Only those who can't find husbands need to get educated and have a job. Saguna disagreed with him and told him that probably he thought of himself as a good choice for a woman. She added that even if he were to propose to her and the whole world endorsed his proposal she would not marry him. Her answer to another person in the same party would hold good for all times. A gentleman asked her if she had thought about the pros and cons of getting educated. Was she ready to face great obstacles, stay amidst strangers and live alone? "Yes", said Saguna, "I am ready."

Krubai's other novel *Kamala* is about the life of a child widow in a Hindu family. She ends her novel in a rather unusual way considering the time when she wrote it. At the end of the novel the widow is proposed to by her close childhood friend who tells her the life of a widow was no life to live. The widow rejects his offer but tells him that his love would be a constant source of strength for her whenever darkness surrounded her but that she would rather be alone. Remarriage of the widow would have been a "bold" ending but the contemplative mood in which she leaves her heroine, with the warmth of a good friendship, speaks a lot about her understanding of the sensitive side of a woman who is taking her life in her own hands.

Both the novels recreate for us women of those days; Some steeped in prejudices, the others fighting; Women we must know in order to understand our present lives.

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C. S. Lakshmi



## Struggles of Women Refugees

The Tamils of Sri Lanka are refugees on the Indian soil from 1983, Anti-Tamil riots affected the island in 1956, 1938, 1961, 1974, 1977, 1981 but the worst came in 1983.

The middle and upper class refugee families are residing independently in towns and cities of Tamilnadu. The economically underprivileged are forced to live in the camps — many of them in sub-human environment.

The women refugees have vivid descriptions of the disaster that wrecked their lives:

"Our family stayed within four walls without light, all the doors, windows locked, and with a minimum of cooking — under instruction from the local gang; if we made ourselves conspicuous we should bear the consequences: an immediate burning down of the house."

"They started burning our house while we were inside."

"From the day the army was posted at Jaffna tension mounted. The army would enter any house and shoot any civilian."

"My children were affected because even now when they see a police man they shout: army, army."

"My husband was arrested under the Prevention of Terrorism Act. He was kept in jail before being killed. He was a threat to the Government as he had the support of the 1000 plantation workers who were rehabilitated in Vavuniya. I wasn't shown his body. He died for the people. But I let my imagination go wild and imagine that my husband is alive somewhere. I feel I am a

selfish woman now concerned only about my family. I am a coward escaping from the reality and taking refuge in India."

"In my village in the North militants stayed with us, hence the army was a regular visitor. They would come in hundreds in the night and we had to flee to the forest carrying our children."

"During the riots I was in hospital for my delivery and my husband couldn't even come to the hospital because, the riots had sent all the Tamils from the estates to the forests. I heard that the Sinhalese people who were eating with us as a family burnt all the tamil shops and looted all the houses."

"During the riots our house had a narrow escape only because our sinhalese house owner saved us from the gang that came and looted us. My brothers were identified as Tamils, and were badly beaten. Immediately we all shifted to Pesalai — a fishing village."

"We never felt at home in Ceylon. In the 1983 riots the sinhalese business partner of my husband destroyed a part of his business. They were troubling my husband from 1981. Our house was not attacked but we went to a refugee camp for safety."

"I stayed in an area about 80 kilometers from Colombo. We heard of the neighbouring areas being looted and burnt. And finally we saw teargas burst all around us and we saw our shop and all the surrounding shops being burnt. The police stood watching it. Our house, only few yards away from the shop right opposite the police station, could be the next target. All asked us to leave the house. We did not know where to go. Finally we went into the house of our neighbour, a Sinhalese; from there we heard the sounds of our house being attacked."

"In Jaffna the purpose of the posting of the army by the Government was not fulfilled because they did

everything else except what they were supposed to do. During any bank looting the army would watch it and after the boys left they would shoot at the civilians. They would come and search any house they wanted and take anyone."

"I was a member of the organising committee for the rehabilitation of refugees; but within a week I also left for India, because I was fed up with the procedure adopted at the camp. A good lump of aid from foreign countries did not reach the needy. It either went to the rich Tamil or the rich Sinhalese families or to the army. Quite a large amount of plastic containers, bags, lungies, soaps, failed to reach the needy in the camps. They were never even seen by the refugees. The Sri-Lankan refugee camps were meant only to boost the national image in the international arena. Now all the foreign aid was channelled through the Government. Much of it was diverted, only the minimum trickled down to the people in need. But on the international front the Sinhalese government earned the name of sheltering the refugees. A good example is that tents from Canada for the refugees were taken to Amparai at Sinhalese area and the Sinhalese were settled there."

"Unable to stand the terrifying situation and the horrible life in Sri-Lanka, we left by boats for India but even in the sea we had a narrow escape as the navy on the coast fired at us."

We re-live these moments as we hear of increasing violence on the island. The dream of a peaceful future ahead still lingers on. The people of Tamilnadu were magnanimous to accept us but we have been going through hell.

### **Struggle continues**

"The houseowner after listening to our pathetic stories increases the house rent by an exorbitant amount. If we are not able to pay it we are compelled to leave."

The camp is a nightmare — no privacy for us women.

About 30 families stay under one roof with no partitions. The toilets were regularly cleaned in the initial stages but now no one cares about them. We can't even enter the toilets, we are forced to the open field — a new distressing experience for us. The water is available once in two days but we have no vessels to store it.

The allowance paid by the Government is insufficient hence we take up any employment available for a meagre wage of Rs. 2 or Rs. 3 a day.

Families have started leaving for Sri Lanka in 1987. A woman remarks, "it's better to die a certain death at the hands of the security forces rather than be anxious about an uncertain tomorrow in the camps".

### Neighbours

"There is a great difference. In Sri Lanka even if we want a loan of Rs. 10/- we can get it any time we want but here it's difficult to get even fifty paise. In Sri Lanka neighbours are helpful, if someone is sick they even come and cook for us but here even if the person is dying no one will come."

"In Sri Lanka neighbours are concerned about one another; but here it is not so. I had a very bad experience; when my husband met with an accident no one volunteered to inform my people. I had to beg and plead for help. Finally one volunteered."

### Perception of the Indian women

"The Indian women view the Sri Lankan women as women of loose morals because they hardly talk to men whereas we talk freely with everyone and we have lots of guests."

"The women here do not relate much with their husbands and they are sacred too. They go for cinemas when



the husbands are not at home and return before they come back. The Indian women spend most of their day doing housework. Two hours for drinking water, two hours for ration, two hours for milk and have little time for recreation whereas in Sri Lanka there exists all this work but not so much time is spent by women."

"Women are treated low. To be born a woman in India is bad, and a difficulty for the parents. Women are self-centered and are bothered only about their own families. They are subservient to their husbands and the husbands bully them."

### Conclusion

Amidst continued struggles life continues.

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Ramanie Fernando

## **An Open Letter to the Women of Bangalore**

The yellow tree blossoms all over our city at this time of the year and brings with it a special day: The Women's Day. March 8, International Women's Day is celebrated all over the world as the anniversary of our beginning. It is the best day perhaps, to reach out to women all over our city to re-affirm the hope, to remember the promises, to retouch the dream. And to share this with one another.

Through the year and through the dailiness of our lives, we know the reality of poverty, of pain: so many women struggling to survive; so many raped, burnt to death, violated. Most women in our country are poor women. Most 'unemployed' are women. Most refugees are women. For women are, no matter how we draw the lines of caste or class, the poorest of the poor. Almost everywhere women are pushed into un-skilled jobs, almost everywhere women work longer hours under more difficult conditions, almost everywhere women lack health care, housing, almost everywhere used, abused. Women are often the worst victims of 'development', of war, of communal violence, of police brutality.

The horrors of Bhopal are still with us. Besides the immediate deaths, still births and abortions, there has been an increase in the number of retarded children born to women exposed to the toxic gases. Thousands of women have been injured for life. Violence, in its different manifestations, has been woven into the fabric of our lives: we remember specially the women victims

of Begur, Ramanagaram, Pavagada, women killed in communal riots in language fueds, women raped in police stations, women in the Punjab where the escalating violence is rending the society apart.

We could write many obituaries to each one who died, except that there is not enough paper or ink or tears ... And yet, we must think of the many women who through individual acts of courage have refused the darkness; women bursting forth in collective expressions of organising for water, for houses; women demanding that shelter for their families as a fundamental human right; women protesting dowry, wife-beating; women on strike for wages, for their rights to the land; women walking for peace, women dreaming of the kind of future we want for our children and the children of the world.

A seed here, a flower there.

In Sri Lanka amidst the heightening ethnic violence the women in the North have formed the Mothers' Front to protest the arbitrary arrest and detention of their sons and to provide help to the strife-torn island. In the South women of all ethnic communities have formed the Women's Front for Peace, a movement which deplors the violence all around and pleads for a political rather than a military solution to the problem. As in Sri Lanka, in the mainsquares of many third world cities, wives, mothers, daughters, sisters gather, holding up photographs of their loved ones who have been taken away by the military who are their country's rulers. They bear witness to love and courage in the struggle against violence and ruthless power. It is only the silence of the squares that comes to listen to them; only the pavements that see the photographs of the forgotten ones: where are their seventeen year old sons? their husbands? the fathers of their children?

The women continue to hope: and so too women all over the world. A woman carpet weaver in Iran through her tears weaves her strength into her fabric. "Don't despair: the day will come when we will claim the joys

of spring to ourselves''. Little Sadako dying in a hospital bed sent a similar message to the world. She was one of the victims of the atomic bombing of Nagasaki and very ill from radiation sickness. She remembered the legend (of her country) that if one made a thousand paper cranes one's wish would come true. She spent her last days making hundreds of beautiful paper birds. She died before she finished her thousand cranes. Her wish was for peace — that there would be no more wars, no more killings.

She had a dream.

We women too hope for a world free from wars and weapons; free from systems which exploit and dehumanize, free from communal violence, ethnic and race conflicts; a world in which apartheid, caste, famine, poverty will be unknown; a world in which our children can laugh and learn and dance.

We have a dream.

We women are searching for fresh spaces, seeking new ways forward; telling our own stories writing our poetry, working with each other, discovering new human strengths, finding our roots, singing our root song.

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Vimochana



## Springs of Living Water

The beatification of Edith Stein reminds us of the extent to which human madness can develop when the heart leaves the love of God. Because Judith was a Jewess, she had to die. Millions of people perished in a senseless war. Murder camouflaged as patriotism. The root cause is man's unsatiable hunger for power, prestige, material advantage. Man in his search for happiness, is erring from God's values and priorities and replacing them with his own.

Now the targets are the women. Sure, the oppression has lasted for centuries under the most pious pretences, but now it has reached a peak. Mass murder of female foetuses and the burning of brides has become a national calamity. You would think that the Church would set a sign and cry out against atrocities. This is not so. It is a male Church and only some leaders have perceived the seriousness of the hour. I have talked to the Principal of a school about crimes against women. All the reaction I got was a sleepy "Is it so?" Very few can drum loud enough to draw the attention of the masses. Now and then some Church paper does speak out but how many read it and how many shake off their lethargy to act?

Women are on the move to shake off their chains. It might be one of the most powerful revolutions the world has ever seen. Fundamentalism tries to stop the tide with rigorous laws. The patriarchs can suppress women for sometime but finally women will win.

What do we Christian women stand for?

What is our vision? The Kingdom of God, built on love, freedom, equality! material prosperity is included. Harmony and co-operation between men and women must be the aim. Unless women nurse a hope for this Kingdom, unless signs are set that we are on the way to it, women will move away from the Church, there will be a silent exodus. We talk of the Church and mean the structures, the hierarchy. Is this the whole Church? Are not we women the Church, at least half of it? Have we not learnt that soups are cooked on the fire below?

Still, I was sitting down, gloomy and brooding and tense. I did not see what sign I could set, what hope I could give. Who am I to tackle such a gigantic problem? Would it not be better to keep aloof? I turned to the New Testament, looking for a word of the Lord. The story of the Samaritan woman fascinated me. She was certainly not a saint. In no Church would she be chosen to be even a sacristan. Only Jesus looked deeper, saw her great capacity to love, and made her an apostle. He gave her a wonderful promise: From your own heart, there will spring a stream of living water and those who drink it, will never thirst again. I reflected — water, what a wonderful symbol of his grace: cleansing, quenching thirst extinguishing fire. How many of my sisters and brothers will wait on the wayside and say: 'Give me a drink' I am a small, insignificant person. I am not able to do big things, but with His grace, I can at least make a small effort.

I went to a building site, where a nine year old girl held a baby in her arms. "Don't you go to school?" "Who will look after my brother?" was the astonished answer. I noticed the TB glands on her neck and the feverish eyes. I called her brother, a coolie digging a ditch for an electric cable. "My parents died; I have to look after my sisters, besides my family. Two sisters are left, this one, and a fourteen year old, whom I will marry off next month. I will have to spend money for the wedding, there is nothing left for school or treatment! I too have TB."

When the supervisor saw me talking to the girl, he came and pointed out a woman worker, carrying sand on her head. That one is very poor. Her husband left her. Her crippled mother lives with her. They came from Orissa, strangers, living on the platform of the railway station or on some one's verandah for a day or two, till they are chased away. The workers agreed to build her a hut from the left-over bits of material and tins of paint.

Narayan, a supervisor, earned enough to live comfortably. He started as a coolie and worked his way up. At home in his village, he has a house and some land. He has three sons and a daughter. "What's with you, Narayan, you look so worried", I said. "My daughter is 15 years old. The village elders urge me to marry her off this year. Now the fifth boy whom I approached has refused, because I cannot pay the dowry, Rs. 18,000/- cash and a motor bike and a TV set."

The postman brought a letter from Dr. X, an agronomist in a good government job. Did I know some organisation abroad where he could earn more? "I have three daughters" he writes, "the eldest is 15 years old. As I was living in a village area, she had no chance of a good education. The second girl found a place last year in a good mission school." I knew the youngest one, a lovely kid of six; she has life for two, jumping about like a rubberball. Instead of enjoying his children, the poor man worries about the dowry he will have to pay.

Two orphan girls, whom I know well, were sent to a school. Usha was in the high school; Martha, being a slow learner, could not pass and was engaged in house work. The driver of the school vehicle seduced them. Martha was pregnant. She was whisked away to a house of Mother Theresa. Usha was taken out of school and placed somewhere else. The prestige of the family weighed more than the welfare of the girls! I asked for the address of the girls so that I could write to them. Whatever

happened, they should not feel abandoned. But I got no answer. I know, I will have to ask again a couple of uncomfortable questions.

I went to the slums, where the parish maintains a little school. The girls were a minority. I met dozens of them in the lanes between the hutments, unkempt and in torn clothes, carrying their little brothers and sisters. I visited some families requesting them to send their girls to school. I found even grown up girls illiterate. Two I could motivate to go for a year to a grihini school; one remained and one ran away. Another girl, very gifted one was reading in an English school. When the father was sick of TB he took her out. Some months ago the father died, leaving the widow with 5 children. I went on to see another widow. She was sitting motionless on her bed, staring in the air. Some days ago, her husband hanged himself in the very room in which we were sitting. He had been suspended from his job, a sick man addicted to alcohol.

If all women, would set signs of hope, don't you think that the world would begin to change? I remember a poster: The elephants are strong — but the ants are many and they too accomplish something.

I must confess that I have discovered so many springs of living water in other people's hearts. I have received much encouragement and inspiration from these simple and brave women.

### At Jacob's well

O Lord I too come to you with  
the Samaritan woman.  
My heart is empty like her jar,  
thirsting for the spring of living water.  
Will you not repeat your promise?  
See, my sisters cry out:



We are thirsting for love and acceptance,  
give us a drink.

Without you, what can I give  
in my poverty?  
Do you hear the cry of the brides  
from the kerosine fires?  
Only the stream of your compassion  
can give us the strength  
to quench the flames.

Does not the sobbing of the widow,  
the anguish of the beaten wife,  
move you?

Do bend to the leper woman,  
chased out of her home as  
a curse,  
and to the prostitute in her forsakenness.

Lord, do touch the rock of  
my, of our, hardened hearts  
and wake the springs of living waters  
that they may gush forth in never ceasing  
streams  
and bring life to your people !

Holy Cross School  
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M. Sigrid Voggel

## **Women Getting Organised**

### **- an Experiential Account**

In the early seventies I was part of the radical students' movement and the trade union movement in Gujarat. At that time, Women's Liberation was a matter of jest. It was thought that only the upper middle class, westernised and crazy women were "Women's Libbers".

I was involved in the Navnirman Movement (1974 and anti-price-rise movement of Women (1974-75) in Gujarat. At that point my major concern was working for the poor, toiling masses. Women's issues seemed to me insignificant in front of price-rise, unemployment, untouchability etc.

During 1975, an International Women's Year, traditional women's organisations and mass media gave some coverage on women's concerns. Myth of a very high status of women was shattered by some stark facts and figures highlighted by the Government-appointed Status of Women's Committee. Seminars, conventions and conferences highlighted the plight of Indian Women. At that time also, for me the solution of all forms of exploitation, oppression, degradation and injustices consisted in the strengthening of working class struggles. Specific problems of women did not seem to require any urgent attention. To me, women were "the oppressed sex"; the way the Dalits were the "oppressed caste" and the tribals were "the oppressed nationalities". One had read a lot of literature on feminism, Women's Liberation Movement in the West. It appealed but it left one with the thought that it was O.K. for Western Women but it was a non-issue for the women of India.

But slowly and gradually things were changing. Reports of Pune and Trivandrum Conventions of women where Indian women from different sections of society discussed the status of women and decided to struggle against their exploitation and oppression were inspiring. By 1977, many women activists with experiences of trade union and other types of mass work, student movements and democratic rights movements started to give vent to their dissatisfaction against discrimination which they faced in their respective organisations. Small informal group meetings to discuss 'women's question' and perspective on women's liberation movement started to be held.

Men around us started making funny remarks during those days. "Oh! Today, you seem more equal?" "Don't you think women enjoy rape?" "Does it not gratify their ego that men are wanting them?" "You women's Libber? You frustrated woman, talking of women's rights, feminism and all that!" "Don't spoil peace in the family by talking of women's rights."

In 1978, we organised a workshop where women activists expressed the need for independent organisations for women that would take up specific issues of women. In the post-emergency period, many democratic rights organisations and media had highlighted excesses by police on women undertrials and prisoners. Moreover during every case and communal riots Dalit, poor and muslim women were raped not only by the goons but also by the police. When the supreme court's Judgement on Mathura rape case set the rapist — policemen scot-free, we were extremely enraged. We formed the Forum Against Rape. Signature campaigns, discussions on rape law, street-theatre, anti-rape songs were worked out. The media reacted positively. More and more women victims of violence started approaching our group. Its scope did not remain limited to the issues of rape. We took up issues such as dowry, wife-beating, sexual harassment at work place, legal rights of women, sexism in media.

And by September, 1980 Forum Against Rape became Forum Against Oppression of Women. During our campaigns we came in touch with women's groups in Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamilnadu, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, Goa and Assam. We used to share experiences, strengthen one another and support each other through camps, workshops, signature campaigns etc. To provide a common platform for debate and discussion we organised two National Conferences — one during November, 1980 and the other during December, 1985 on "Perspective for Women's Liberation Movement in India."

By 1982, many special interest groups of women had come into existence. Campaign groups, research centres, women's resource centres, support structures for individual women in social distress, women's groups concentrating on the problems of working class women or slum women, media forums, women's street theatre groups had come into existence in Bombay, Delhi, Bangalore, Hyderabad, Kanpur, Madras, Madurai, Ahmedabad. Mass organisations like trade unions, civil liberties groups, political parties, researchers, academicians and even government had started taking cognisance of 'women's question'!

Women from various walks of life — workers, agricultural labourers, white collar employees, scientists, researchers, academicians and political parties started organising themselves through separate associations. Women's studies got acceptance as a separate discipline. Protest against existing sexist values in media and search for alternate media began. In every issue — drought, communalism, working class struggle, health, politics, religious institutions — women's concern got highlighted. New awareness and consciousness on status of women is seen to rise as a result of the process of women's getting organised. Thus has been confirmed once again the historical truth that emancipation from oppression is an act of the oppressed themselves. If women want a dignified life, they will have to show their collective strength. No



benevolent patriarch or messiah will liberate them. They will have to strive for themselves. Self organisation is the only key to freedom.

Networking of women's groups in various parts of the country, between rural and urban women, between working class and non-working class, women with different skills has solidified the process of women's movement. During 1978 - 1987 I have been invited by various groups of women in Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Gujarat, Kerala, Tamilnadu and Bengal to share the experiences and concerns of women. This has given me a wider perspective and helped me identify regional differences and commonalities of problems faced by Indian women. My exposure to the Conference of Asian women's Research and Action Network 'Asian Women Speak Out' and the Nairobi Conference by the NGOs and my work in preparing the resource kit on 'Women's Organisation, participation and consciousness' for Asia and Pacific Development Centre - all this has helped enhance my understanding and perception of Asian Women's problems.

At present we are trying to organise a national campaign against sex Determination sex pre-selection test, leading to female foeticide, harmful injectible contraceptives and anti-women plural laws. Like every other movement, women's movement has also faced periods of ebb and flow. But the process of self-organisation of women affirms the hope that liberation of humanity from the clutches of exploitation, oppression, degradation and injustice is possible because the women's movement does not challenge the patriarchal domination only, it challenges all other forms of domination - relationships based on class, caste and culture. Hence for the liberation of humankind, women's liberation is a must.

2/72, 'Geleki'  
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Vibhuti Patel

# Women Development: Analysis of Work\*

## I

### 1. Introduction

When I began to work among the people in 1984 I had no specific intention of organizing Women's groups only. There was a youth group (for men only) and a Bible study group (for men and women). Liberation Theology was a major source of inspiration. The word of God became alive as a double-edged sword. It slowly began to wake up the people of Mudianur parish in Periar Dt.

We began to explore the root cause of poverty, unemployment, illiteracy, and the powerlessness of the poor people. Then I realised that in the mixed group women hardly spoke. They were dominated by men just as it happens in society. In fact people were not ready for joint ventures. So I began to organise seminars separately for men and women, and found that women were actually more ardent in their quest for justice and freedom. Later in 1985 I was invited to be the co-ordinator of Women Development in Coimbatore Diocese. To-day there are 33 *Groups of Women*

In my experience women are the greatest potential for change. They carry out group decisions faster than men do. Now I realise the importance of organising women who experience multiple oppression.

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\* Paper prepared for the WINA Consultation on Women's Development.

Today the quest for change of the oppressed sections of society grows more urgent than ever before. Various movements are sprouting in different parts of the globe. In India there are more than 2000 action groups involved in motivating people for social change. While women belong to the oppressed section of society irrespective of caste, class or religion their contribution towards change seems to be small or none. Even if they are involved their efforts seemingly disappear like a drop in the ocean. Moreover women are an untapped source of power. Their life is greatly wound up with irrational, superstitious and mythical beliefs in addition to pressing responsibilities. Energy can never be held in station for long. And so inspite of their subordination women have made attempts to break out of their shell and manifest their strength in a constructive manner.

## 2. Women's rights

The highest aspiration of our people as expressed in the Preamble of the Indian Constitution goes as follows:

"We the people of India, have solemnly resolved to form India into a sovereign, socialist, secular, democratic republic and to guarantee to all its citizens, *Justice*, social, economic, political; *Liberty* of thought expression belief/faith and worship; *Equality* of status and opportunity and to promote among them all *Fraternity*: of ensuring the dignity of the individual and the unity and integrity of the nation." A big question that arises in my mind is whether this statement is applicable only for a small but privileged section or for all the people of the Indian sub-continent?

Ideology: *Some of the major ideas* that propelled me to begin and continue this work:

- Woman is equally a human being like man. Discrimination against woman is a crime.

- Women are overburdened with various kinds of activities within the home as well as out-side. And they are neither able to make a decision nor have a say in this matter.
- Employed women bear double burden, having to work in their profession and their home while men can have leisure time for relaxation and recreational pursuits.
- Many young women are unable to get married due to demands for dowry.
- Women's movements are controlled through the permanent threat of rape.
- Dalit women experience double oppression — from their husbands as well as from the high caste. Domestic workers too have the same experience.
- Educational opportunities are largely for boys and men. Women aren't given the same opportunity to have access to education.
- Women should know that *only they can free themselves from bondage* and exploitation by the other half of humankind.
- Women should have equal right over the family property and it should be registered in her name also.
- Our society is sick in various ways. Woman has the noblest quality to be the *Shock Absorber maintaining the equilibrium of society in the psychological, social as well as the spiritual spheres.*
- Woman is the transmitter of traditional values and cultural patterns. In a society that is increasingly becoming specialised, woman needs to uplift herself to handover the cultural heritage of our society which will enable the younger generation to become catalysts of change. It would reduce the resistance to change and prepare a generation of persons



who love justice. Educating a woman also means educating a family, as well as society.

These are some of the probing questions that keep stirring my conscience. How could such a situation be best understood? How to approach these problems? What steps should be taken to initiate changes in these spheres? It only reveals the complexity of the problem and the urgency with which changes should be initiated.

*Our basic belief is that woman is the store-house of energy and possesses the power for change. She is shakti with great creative potential, constantly and continually participating in the creative activity of God, be it in the home, in the field, in the factory or in the classroom.*

Our task is only to make women realise that society depends on women for two thirds of its labour and so women have a right to be recognised as such and given their rightful place in society. Our task is to consciously activate their potentialities as well as ours since we are also part of the same oppressed section, and direct our energies towards becoming self-respecting, self-reliant and self-governing. Though we have not achieved much this goal is gradually becoming a reality.

## II

### 3. Initiatives

Here are some of the *Concrete Initiatives* taken by our group of Women Development Animators.

**a) Playing games:** We gather the women as a group to think and decide the course of their lives. Meetings are held once in two weeks in all the 33 associations. Every meeting begins with a game. This exercise enables them to become alive and active in body, mind and spirit. Though they were reluctant to participate in the game in

the initial stage (they said, do you think we are children ?), now, they look forward to the same.

It provides them healthy relaxation as well as an opportunity to build up positive relationships with members of the group. All barriers of caste, religion, language and class are easily overcome through this device. In a few of the associations we have not been able to eradicate caste distinction. In general, women stand together as a group of people who collectively experience oppression in their villages from landlords, officials or husbands.

**b) Speech making:** At every meeting one person speaks to the group on a particular topic chosen by the group in the previous meeting. In some associations they also share news about current events. This practice gives them a sense of self-respect, and develops their confidence. Leadership qualities are slowly built up.

Often they give talks on the problems of women and the need for them to stand together. Sharing their views on a particular problem clarifies their thinking and leads them to take decision as a group. Thus in some places they have stopped atrocities towards women like wife beating, or social problems like drinking and gambling. In one place they have stopped people from bathing near the well.

In several places representatives of women's groups take part in the village committee by demanding a say in the collective decision-making. For example, Vadakara Panchayat of Palghat Dt. the Kuriyarkutti canal project. Slowly they are beginning to have a say in the family as well as in village life. Collective decision-making gives them not only a sense of power but also of self-government.

Many associations have won facilities from the government such as drinking water, electricity, sanitation, bank loans, as well as cottage industries.

In several instances men could not do it. To meet the expense of writing petition etc... every member

pays at least one rupee per month to the association. Apart from this, small savings are a regular feature. Some associations of 25 to 30 members have saved up to Rs. 7000/- in a year. This gives them a sense of self-reliance and a certain amount of control over their life and finances.

**c) People's theatre:** We make use of *People's Theatre* during our meetings such as role play, folk dance and songs, chalk-talk, puppet show, parables enacted with masks, Liberation songs, villupattu (song narration with a bow), posters, slide show etc... Then the group analyses the problem and is guided towards discovering its root cause. Issues of immediate importance are further discussed and decisions taken and duties are allotted to particular persons. Thus people themselves become the agents of change. They have also become fearless in facing Govt. authority and officials, police, politicians and the village elders.

In some places there are changes in the traditional structure of village administration. Village panchayat which would be attended only by the elders is now represented by the office bearers of both women's association and youth association.

In mixed groups equal importance is given to all religions. Thus we have Inter-religious prayer services, reading from different scriptures and Bhajan singing.

After a certain stage of growth we have tried to create links between associations of a particular locality. In four places we have successfully brought them together for meeting and exchange of views. They have taken a stand together regarding common issues.

#### 4. Future plans

Our main target is to create a women's movement not particularly aligned to any political power. In order to achieve this we have to intensify education for motivation by utilising the resources of the association itself employing communication techniques. This will help them bring out women's hidden powers and talents.

Though we have given some importance to economic development our aim is not welfare activity. Our aim is structural change for which people must be gradually educated and strengthened in their convictions. They have to develop critical thinking in order to analyse society and take a stand when faced with crisis.

On the 8th of March to celebrate the International Women's Day we plan a three day celebration called *Namadhu Visha* meaning our celebration. There are representatives from all the 33 associations participating in this function. Women's talents and their potentialities received maximum attention; and their problems and their emerging new strength are highlighted.

From Nov. 1985 we have also started to train another group of Women development workers at our congregation level. There are 12 young ladies working in this project of our Institute, wholly financed by the Congregation. This group concentrates on the diocese of Ootacamund where our houses are located.

### III

In my experience the following are some of the issues on women. *Economic disability*: For the same work done by men and women, women are given lower wages. Women have no ownership of property which silences her in everything pertaining to family matters. She is never able to make a decision about her life. She is almost the private property of the patriarchal family. *Dowry* is the worst form of evil in the present day. So many young girls remain unmarried because of dowry. Those who are married are constantly harassed by husband and in-laws to bring more from their fathers' house.

*Sexual harassment*: Women are kept in permanent fear of being raped. This becomes a major hurdle in women development as they are unable to move around freely alone. Chastity is a great virtue of women. It is the girl who bears all the gossip of the village while the boy



is somehow excused and made even to escape. When women take initiative they are laughed at and even prevented in some cases. They are expected to be confined to home even if they attend the association meeting. "Biology is destiny" for many women. They are dubbed the weaker sex and treated with cultural conditionings for which they are not responsible.

*Domestic confinement:* Love and respect become a wet blanket to cover all the miseries in the home. While the high and low class women have certain amount of freedom the middle class women are the most hit. They neither can have a say within the family nor can express their burden outside for the sake of safe-guarding family prestige. Yet, all women in general, bear the taunt of drunken husbands. Working women experience double oppression, so also Harijan women and domestic servants. The whole burden of domestic duties, fetching water often from long distances, gathering fire wood, washing clothes, cleaning the surroundings, child rearing, cooking as well as working either in the field or in other occupations consume the whole of their time and energy. Thus they are unable to take time for recreation or for developing their intellectual capacity. When husband and wife return home after work she has to continue to work for another four to five hours while the man relaxes, smokes, drinks or reads news.

Widows in our society are the most to be pitied. They neither have any family status nor social status. They are expected to vegetate and die.

While there is a little awakening regarding women's rightful place in society her place in the church is *insultingly made passive*. No where in the church women are given a leading role. Often they are the cleaning machines of the church for which they can climb the sanctuary but not for reading the Word of God. It seems she will pollute the sanctuary. She is totally silent in the formulation of rules and regulations of the parish. Even

decisions regarding family planning, abortion and divorce are dictated from above.

These issues in fact help us to clarify the concept of women development. *Women development means to touch the wounds of God in woman who is continually being crucified and is shedding blood for the sake of humanity.* It means God who is Mother and Father is equally concerned in the well-being of Her daughters. Woman is the real power. Shakti, the force behind the whole movement in society. She should be recognised as such. The scar that woman is but half human must be erased. She should be given equal opportunity to develop her body, mind, intellect, will and spirit. Women's analysis, assessment, plans and goals must spring from their own thinking. Economic independence is the door to acquiring a say in society. Only by possessing the power of a 'voice', can women slowly eradicate sex discrimination.

The possibilities of women's highest capacity must be explored. Self-respect, self-reliance and self-government should be experienced by women as a result of women development. The social, economic and political power must be decentralised and shared with women.

It used to be a virtue to be a good wife and a self-sacrificing mother. But today the situation is changing. Women would like to make a contribution not only to the family but also to society. The virtues of love, compassion, kindness, gentleness, meekness, patience etc... should be accorded not only to women but also to the whole of humanity. At the same time women must also take risks, be courageous, and fearless of anyone. Woman should not be considered a dependent being. Woman is in fact the real force in society. Action becomes human and redeeming based on the consciousness of the individual. If so, woman's action must be acknowledged as such and she should know it. Woman is a partner in family as well as in social life.

Science and technology should not be manipulated by male domination favouring the well-being and happiness of their own gender.

Research and study should be undertaken to discover the root of discrimination against women while she is adored as goddess, and the poet does not spare words in describing her beauty. Why should an unborn female infant be killed? Why should women eat after men?



Why should girls be confined to the home? Why should she be a slave to man? Therefore women development means allowing God to give *Full* expression to Herself/Himself. Woman is part of the divine allowing the creative force to flow through her. She is the *Divine Energy*. This energy must develop a feminine flow of history.

Domestic service should be given its due place in society and not be looked down upon. It should be seen as an employment and men too should participate in it. Women should not be segregated as domestic workers. So also men should have equal share in the socialisation of the young.

Woman is known as the queen of the home, the fragrant flower, the bridge between persons, the source of love, the highest compassion and the light in the family. These ideas should be accepted and acknowledged by all in society.

Women must become the voice of the voiceless, miracle of the disabled, liberator of the oppressed. She should be a wife, mother, as well as an equal member of society who stands for the achievement of the highest goals and aspirations of society.

Society as a whole is in need of liberation. Women's liberation does not seek an exclusive liberation. On the contrary Women's Liberation is bound up with the liberation of the rest of the oppressed humanity. Therefore Woman's Association must be linked with all those who are working towards creating a just and participatory society.

Women themselves must create and organise their own structures. That is the only way of gaining back the right that we have lost. Otherwise we would only remain as appendices as it happens in some meetings where men are anxious to give a place to woman. Yet, joint ventures are valuable and should be encouraged wherever it is possible. If women of the world, the half of humanity, got together and stood for their rights they would see the dawn of *New Life* on earth.